

**Town of Montreat
Board of Commissioners
Special Meeting
October 10, 2014
Walkup Building**

Board members present: Mayor Letta Jean Taylor
Mayor Pro Tem Mary Standaert
Commissioner Martha Campbell
Commissioner Tim Helms
Commissioner Jack McCaskill
Commissioner Ann Vinson

Town staff present: Ron Nalley, Town Administrator
Susan Taylor Rash, Town Attorney
Misty R. Gedlinske, Town Clerk
Steve Freeman, Public Works Director
Barry Creasman, Senior Water Operator
David Arrant, Master Police Officer
Justyn Whitson, Police Officer

Approximately 85 members of the public were also present. Mayor Taylor called the meeting to order at 2:00 p.m., led the group in reciting the Pledge of Allegiance and gave the invocation.

Agenda Approval

Mayor Pro Tem Standaert moved that the meeting agenda be amended to clearly indicate that final Town Hall site selection action would be taken during today's meeting. Commissioner Vinson seconded. The motion to approve the meeting agenda as amended carried 4/1, with Commissioner Helms voting in opposition.

Public Comment

Mr. Wade Burns of 232 North Carolina Terrace spoke about his educational background and professional experience as a licensed architect, planner and general contractor. He stated that aside from Commissioner McCaskill, none of the Commissioners were experts in building sciences. He encouraged the Board to appoint a community task force to gather additional information and provide recommendations regarding the Town Hall project prior to making a final site selection decision.

Mr. Bill Hollins of 116 Shenandoah Terrace did not feel it was appropriate for the Board to take action to select a Town Hall site at this time. He stated that the citizen comment cards had been sent out without clear instructions to either the public or the ad hoc tabulation committee, and that there was considerable public opposition to the Florida Terrace site. He felt it was possible to find a Town Hall site that was an acceptable compromise to all concerned, and encouraged the Board to seriously consider further examination of the Pratt Park site. He

believed that choosing this location would not result in a significant loss of Greenspace, and that at least a third of the existing vegetation and landscaping could be retained.

Mrs. Ann Seaman of 425 Appalachian Way felt that the Florida Terrace site was an acceptable location for the Town Hall facility. She said she would support the Board's decision if a different site was selected and hoped that others in the community would do the same. She suggested that, if a different Town Hall site is chosen, the Florida Terrace site should be retained as a contingency option in the event of unsuccessful property acquisition negotiations or excessive development costs.

Mr. Ted Carey of 116 John Knox Road felt that a Town Hall final site selection decision should not be made without knowing the purchase price of the other lots under consideration, and asked the Board to share this information with the public if it was known.

Ms. Jane Holt spoke about the Town of Black Mountain's Town Square Project, briefly summarizing its history and initial lack of public consensus on whether the property should be purchased and how it should be used. She mentioned that Black Mountain's Board of Aldermen had appointed a citizen advisory committee to solicit public input and provide recommendations regarding this project, which took several years to complete. She felt that the public had been pleased with both the decision-making process and the results of the finished project, and encouraged Montreat's Board to consider using a similar approach with regard to the Town Hall facility.

Mr. Gordon Neville of 226 Alabama Terrace asked the Board not to make a final Town Hall site selection at this time, and to instead appoint a task force to further study this issue and make a recommendation that the entire community could support.

Mrs. Clare Frist of 98 Frist Road thanks the Board and Town staff for their work on the Town Hall issue, and expressed her agreement with previous speakers' requests to delay final site selection action pending recommendations from an appointed task force.

Town Hall Site Selection Discussion and Board Action

Mayor Pro Tem Standaert moved to reaffirm that Montreat's Town Hall should be located within the Montreat town limits. Commissioner Vinson seconded.

During discussion, Mayor Pro Tem Standaert re-read the text of an e-mail from Black Mountain Town Manager Matt Settlemyer, which stated that Black Mountain's Board of Aldermen were not inclined to de-annex any property located within its municipal limits as a general principle. Commissioner Helms said he preferred that the new Town Hall be located inside Montreat's municipal limits, but did not feel he could vote to exclude a location outside the Gate without

knowing the costs to purchase and develop the property, and without having the site professionally evaluated by the Town's architectural firm. Mayor Pro Tem Standaert referred to Mr. Francis Burriss' presentation to the Board during the August 14 Town Council Meeting regarding the merits of this site, as well as statements from the "Montreaters For a New Town Hall in a Better Location" group which claimed that this lot was the only potential Town Hall site had had been fully vetted by their experts. Commissioner McCaskill did not feel that supporters of the proposed Town Hall site located outside the Montreat Gate had been able to adequately verify their claims of significant cost savings associated with this property. He also felt that the Board had clearly stated its position that Montreat's Town Hall should be located within its own municipal limits.

Commissioner Vinson noted that the Tennessee Valley Authority's flood history study of Black Mountain and Montreat mentioned significant flooding in Pratt Park in 1916. She said that while she understood that it was possible to build within a flood plain, this study highlighted the extra developmental challenges these areas posed. She felt that while certain compromises would be necessary with any site selected, the Board had an obligation to provide Town staff with adequate facilities and did not support delaying the project further. Mayor Pro Tem Standaert mentioned another documented flooding event in 1949, as well as a 1983 *Black Mountain News* article concerning public disagreement over the location of a new student center for Montreat College. She explained that one of the main objections to that project was the presence of an operational sewer line on the proposed building site, a circumstance she described as similar to the sewer line present on the proposed lot outside the Montreat Gate. She stated that the Board had considered the lot outside the Gate multiple times over the past several years, and had rejected it as a viable site because of the presence of the sewer line and due to its location within a flood plain area outside of Montreat's municipal limits.

Commissioner Campbell felt that the new Town Hall was the largest capital investment Montreat would likely ever make, and that the facility would best provide for the town's citizens, staff and visitors from a location within the Town's corporate limits. She expressed her support of Commissioner Helms' request at the June 26 Special Meeting and August 14 Town Council Meeting to evaluate additional sites, and thanked the Mountain Retreat Association for identifying which of their properties they would be willing to consider available for purchase. She also felt it would be unethical for her to agree to evaluation of the proposed lot outside the Gate given the Board's previous determination that the site was unsuitable, as well as her own personal objections to this location.

After brief further discussion, the motion to re-affirm that Montreat's Town Hall should be located within the Montreat town limits then carried 4/1, with Commissioner Helms voting in opposition. He stated that he had voted against the motion because he wanted an opportunity to at least consider the alternative Town Hall site proposal located outside the Montreat Gate.

Mayor Pro Tem Standaert asked whether Mayor Taylor or Mr. Nalley had received any confirmation of public statements that one or more members of the “Montreaters For a New Town Hall in a Better Location” group would be willing to purchase the Florida Terrace property from the Town if a different site was chosen for the new Town Hall facility. Neither Mayor Taylor nor Mr. Nalley indicated that they had received any confirmation of such an offer.

The Board then reviewed and discussed each potential Town Hall site individually, as follows:

Above the Gate: Commissioner Campbell was not in favor of this site due to its limited parking space and the need for a three-story Town Hall building which she felt would detract from the appearance of the Montreat Gate entrance area. She also felt that the purpose of the Town Hall was to serve as a business office, and that the current Gate House should continue serving as the community’s designated welcome center. Commissioner Vinson also expressed her concerns about public safety at this site due to the close proximity of large vehicles using the truck bypass route around the Montreat Gate. Commissioner Helms and Mayor Pro Tem Standaert also expressed their opposition to this site.

Pratt Park: Mayor Pro Tem Standaert favored this site’s visibility and proximity to the Montreat Gate, but was also concerned about potential drainage and high water table issues, the impact on surrounding residential homes, and the loss of greenspace in a dedicated memorial park area. Commissioner Helms supported strong consideration of this site, and felt that the lot’s design challenges could be overcome through creative building design. He also felt that some degree of Greenspace loss should be expected with any type of land development, and noted that very few trees would need to be removed if this site were selected. Commissioner Vinson felt it may be possible to develop the Pratt Park site in a way that preserved as much of the existing landscaping and memorial plaques as possible, but said she struggled with the resulting loss of dedicated public greenspace area. She also hoped that, if this site was chosen, the entire property would not need to be rezoned. Commissioner McCaskill said this property was currently zoned as being part of the Town’s Conservation District, and was not in favor of rezoning the lot in order to make it eligible for development as a Town Hall site. Commissioner Campbell also liked Pratt Park’s prominence and visibility, but was concerned about its unknown purchase price and property acquisition terms, as well as the environmental impact of developing the site.

Next to the Post Office: Commissioner Vinson favored this site’s central location and high degree of visibility, but was concerned about its small size and the amount of clear-cutting and grading needed to develop it. She also believed that the average daily visitor count would be much greater for a Town Hall on this site, which could result in additional staffing costs to hire a receptionist or other full-time staff member. Mayor Pro Tem Standaert felt that the level of tree removal needed to develop this site would greatly alter the character of one of the Town’s most visible locations. She was also concerned about further increases in pedestrian and

vehicular traffic in this area. She noted that the cost to purchase this property was unknown at this time, and that the necessary title search for this lot may be extensive. Commissioner McCaskill was also opposed to this location due to its small size, the amount of tree removal needed for development, and the uncertainty over land acquisition or purchase price.

Commissioner Campbell referred to Mr. Lindy Cannon's comments during the September 18 Special Meeting about his family's past efforts to preserve this site as an undeveloped public park, and his opposition to its use as a Town Hall location. While she understood that there was not a deed or other written agreement to support Mr. Cannon's statements, she was concerned that development of the site contradicted his family's expectations for the future of the property. She also noted that parking would be limited on this site, and questioned whether the Post Office's parking lot could be used for overflow parking for meetings or events taking place after normal business hours. Commissioner Helms acknowledged that the Cannon family would likely be unhappy if this site were chosen as the new Town Hall location, and that its purchase price was unknown. He felt that the site's location and proximity to other facilities in the Town's core area were positive factors, and that creative architectural design could help overcome some of the challenges related to its development. He also suggested that the Town could negotiate with the MRA about purchasing the land across from the Post Office on the opposite side of Assembly Drive for use as an overflow parking area. Mayor Pro Tem Standaert pointed out that the sale of any MRA-owned property would require prior approval from their Executive Board, which could cause additional project delays.

Florida Terrace: Commissioner Helms felt that due to the level of public opposition to this site, it should be removed from consideration as a potential Town Hall location. Commissioner McCaskill disagreed, stating that most of the individuals he had spoken with directly had indicated their support for the Florida Terrace site. He listed what he felt were several positive aspects of this location, including its ownership by the Town, Institutional/Residential Zoning District designation, and proximity to the Montreat College campus, Montreat Conference Center facilities and Lake Susan. He noted the absence of underground rock within the proposed excavation area for the facility, as well as the more limited amount of tree removal needed. He also felt that any increase in vehicular traffic levels in the area would be minimal, and that the proposed building design would blend well with the surrounding landscape.

Commissioner Campbell stated that the Florida Terrace site's poor location score was mainly due to its lack of prominence. She felt that although Black Mountain's Town Hall was also located away from the town's central business district, residents and visitors did not seem to have difficulty locating or accessing the facility. Commissioner Vinson agreed that the issue of prominence would be an important factor for all of the potential Town Hall sites, either because of a need for directional signage or because some residents preferred a less visible location for the new facility. She also felt that retaining walls and waterproofing measures were common to most hillside construction sites in Montreat.

Mayor Pro Tem Standaert stated that the two-story building design for the Town Hall would have no impact on the Arkansas Trail side of the property, and that the finished roofline height would be lower than that of the neighboring Sylvan Heights Lodge. She noted that the property was platted as three contiguous lots, and that the site disturbance needed to develop each lot into a separate residential home site would be greater than what was proposed for the Town Hall facility. She also said that from 1963 to 2011, the property had been owned by Montreat College and therefore exempted from ad valorem property taxes. The combined amount of tax revenues generated by the lots in 2012 and 2013 was less than \$900.

Mayor Pro Tem Standaert then indicated the Florida Terrace's site's location on the Montreat Conference Center's facilities map and noted its proximity to all of the administrative offices, dormitories, meeting spaces and places of worship in this area. She compared the 385 vehicle permits issued to on-campus Montreat College students with the 10-15 daily visitors to the Town Services Office, and agreed with Commissioner McCaskill that locating the new Town Hall on Florida Terrace would not create a significant increase in vehicular traffic through the campus area. She responded to concerns about locating an Institutional building in a residential neighborhood by reiterating the transitional nature of the Florida Terrace site's I/R Zoning District designation. She also referred to the Montreat Conference Center's website, which described the location of its ten guest lodges as being scattered among the private residences throughout the community.

Commissioner Campbell said that the Florida Terrace site would allow the Town Hall to serve as an anchor for the surrounding College and Conference Center facilities, and could be available as an additional public meeting space or overflow parking area for community events during evening hours.

Commissioner Helms questioned why some Board members expressed concerns about increased traffic around the lodges near the Post Office but not those located on Florida Terrace. Mayor Pro Tem Standaert stated that the two lodges on Florida Terrace were primarily used to house seasonal conference center staff members, and that she had been in contact with Montreat Conference Center senior leadership team members to address certain issues with staff parking and vehicular traffic along Florida Terrace. She also felt that a Town Hall on Florida Terrace would help bring additional focus to the neighboring College facilities and would be placed closer to the majority of new homes in Montreat, which she noted were being built north of Lake Susan.

Commissioner Helms then moved to remove the Florida Terrace property for consideration as a potential Town Hall site. The motion failed for lack of a second.

Commissioner Campbell spoke about the numerous requests for compromise from members of the public, as well as her own concerns about the importance of making a decision that would best serve the entire community. She said she was discouraged by her review of the site selection comment cards because although the responses contained several strong opinions either in favor of evaluating the lot outside the Gate or in opposition to the Florida Terrace site, she also saw little evidence of a willingness to work together to find a suitable compromise to either of these two positions.

Commissioner Helms moved to request of the Mountain Retreat Association their willingness to sell property across from the Post Office and at what price. The motion failed for lack of a second.

Commissioner Helms then moved to investigate building on the Pratt Park site. Commissioner Vinson seconded.

Commissioner Campbell moved to amend the motion through the addition of the following wording:

“The Town of Montreat be able to work out an agreement with the Mountain Retreat Association for the use of Pratt Park as a Town Hall site within 30 days from today’s date; that Town staff and ADS complete due diligence on the property in order to confirm its suitability for construction of our Town Hall; and should these conditions not be met successfully, the Town Hall location will move to the Florida Terrace site currently owned by the Town of Montreat.”

Mayor Pro Tem Standaert seconded Commissioner Campbell’s suggested motion amendment. Staff confirmed that the Board would first need to vote to approve the suggested amendment to the original motion language before proceeding to vote on the amended motion in its entirety. The vote to approve the amendment language carried 4/1, with Commissioner Helms voting in opposition.

After discussion, the vote on the entire amended motion failed 0/5, with all Commissioners voting in opposition.

Commissioner McCaskill then moved to select the Florida Terrace property as the site of the new Town Hall. Commissioner Vinson seconded. After discussion, the motion then carried 4/1, with Commissioner Helms voting in opposition.

Mayor Taylor again thanked the members of ad hoc comment card tabulation committee for their efforts.

Adjournment

The Special Meeting was adjourned by unanimous vote at 3:54 p.m.

Letta Jean Taylor, Mayor

Misty R. Gedlinske, Town Clerk